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# NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

MARCH 1969

VOLUME IV

NO. 3

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Front Cover: "Bursting Buds"  
photo by R. Dewire

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## ACTIVITIES FOR MARCH

..... Inside Back Cover.

THAMES SCIENCE CENTER, INC.  
622 WILLIAMS STREET  
NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT 06320

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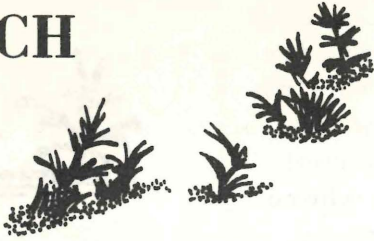
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# MARCH

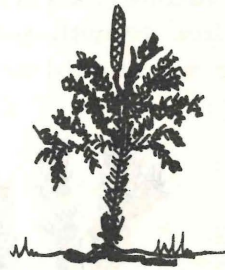


# THE MONTH OF CLUBMOSES

MARCH is the month of the clubmosses. These plants are close relatives of the ferns and are probably more familiar to you when their common names are mentioned.

This is the time of year when the clubmosses are most noticeable. They are evergreen and stand out in winter when the deciduous plants have no leaves. With spring coming these plants are soon surrounded by the green leaves of many of our spring plants and become less noticeable.

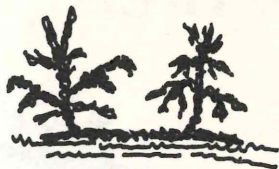
There are three clubmosses that are common to our area. Probably the best known clubmoss is the Princess Pine or Tree Clubmoss. It looks a lot like a young pine tree. This plant often grows in large communities in the woods. The roots of the Tree Clubmoss run along under the ground and send up the plants at intervals. This plant gets its spores or seeds in cone-like branches which makes it seem even more like a young pine tree.



There are several names for our next clubmoss. Among them are Creeping Jenny, Running Pine, and Christmas Green. The leaves of this plant look very much like those of the arbor vitae tree that may grow in your yard. The plant has a trailing root system at the ground surface and if you pull on it, the entire



length of the plant may come up. Many times people who are trying to pick a small piece of this plant end up destroying a great deal of it because of the trailing root system. This is a case where the plant should be left alone.

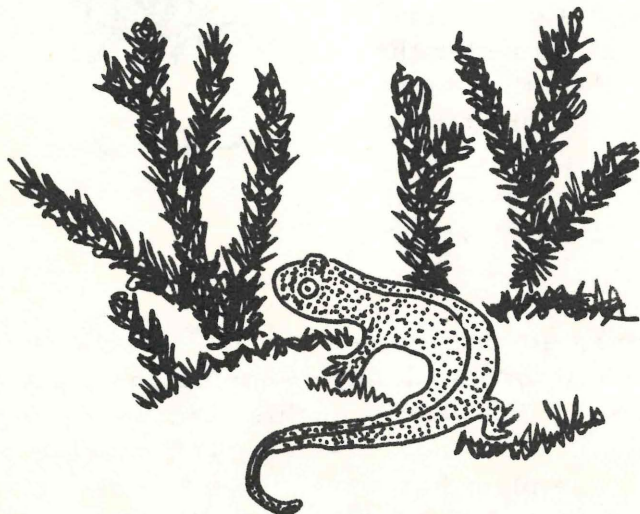


The least familiar of the Clubmosses growing here is the shining clubmoss. This plant grows in clumps, sending up many stalks 4 to 6 inches high. The leaves are rather evenly distributed over the stem, but with one year's growth usually easily identified. You identify the latest year's growth by the fact that it is shining dark green, extends about one-fourth of an



inch long, and is arranged all around the stem. It is this dark shining green of the new leaves that gives the plant its name.

Clubmosses grow very slowly, only about one-fourth to one-half an inch per year. Because of this very slow growth and its branching and trailing root system we should not pick these plants.





# MARCH'S CALENDER

March is the month of early spring sounds of frogs, birds and thawing ice.

March 4 ... The full moon called the Worm Moon.

March 5 ... Wintering ducks are now flocking up preparing to fly north.

March 9 ... Male red-winged blackbirds arrive to begin setting up territories.

March 9 ... The beautiful wood ducks arrive in small wooded brooks and ponds.

March 11 ... The woodcock begin their spectacular courtship flights in fields bordering marshy areas.

March 13 ... Skunk cabbage comes into flower in swamps.

March 15 ... The small geese called Brant increase in numbers along the shore before continuing north.

March 19 ... Wood frogs begin calling in the marshes.

March 20 ... Spring begins at 2:08 P.M. and spring peepers help call it in from swampy areas.

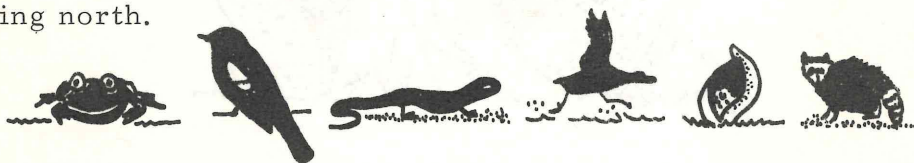
March 23 ... Ospreys begin arriving at their nest sites for the summer.

March 23 ... Phoebe can be heard calling around buildings and rocky ledges where they will nest.

March 28 ... Greater yellowlegs - one of the first of our shorebirds to arrive in spring - can be seen on mudflats.

March 30 ... Painted turtles come out on rocks on sunny days.

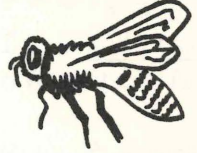
\*\*\*See how many of the above things you can find this month. How close to last year's date given here was your observation? \*\*\*



# TALES FROM PEQUOT HILL

by TRUDY GARDNER

My children and I were strolling through the woods at Pequot Hill looking for signs of Spring.

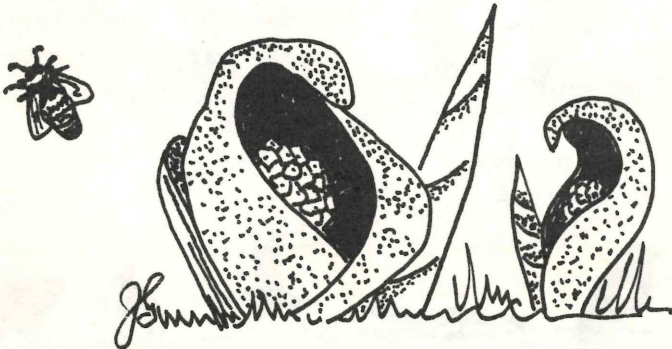


We saw branches of the trees swollen with buds and the busy gray squirrels running along the ground gathering twigs and fallen leaves to make their nests.



Soon we came by our big old oak tree that houses a community of honey bees. Some of them flew out of their hive and headed for the swamp, and we followed. As we walked in the moist swamp we saw the skunk cabbage poking up through the mud like a pointed green spike. The plant unrolls its large cabbage-like leaves later in the Spring. While the leaves are still rolled the hooded flowers appear. You have to look very close to the ground to see these flowers as they do not have stems. The hoods are spotted green and purple holding the yellow flower inside.

The honey bees were gathering the pollen and nectar from this plant. They crawled all over the flowers spreading the pollen. After they had gathered the sweet nectar of the flower they flew back to the old oak tree, bringing the first new nectar of the year.





## ***SPECIAL NATURE STUDY CLASSES***

Registration limited to 10 persons, Fee \$5.00 per course. Classes meet at the Science Center.

COURSE 691: This Week In Nature For Grades 3, 4 and 5. Four Thursday Afternoons beginning March 13 thru April 3. 4:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.

Each week a different group of plants and animals will be discussed. Students will follow the early spring events, through indoor workshops, classes, and field trips.

COURSE 692: Adapt or Die For Grades 6, 7 and 8. Four Tuesday afternoons beginning March 11 thru April 1. 4:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.

This course takes a look at some of the unusual ways plants and animals have had to equip themselves in order to continue to live in the hungry, competitive world of nature.

COURSE 693: Those Birds at Your Feeder:  
For Adults Only. Four Monday mornings beginning March 10 thru March 31. 10:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M.

We will discuss some of the birds that have been coming to your feeder and take a preview look at spring arrivals we can expect. This course will include one field trip.

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REGISTRATION FORM: Mail to Thames Science Ctr.  
622 Williams St. New London

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Course \_\_\_\_\_ Fee \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Course \_\_\_\_\_ Fee \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Your registration will be confirmed.

Registration will close March 7th.

# ROCK HOUNDS *by JERRY THEILER*

In the last article we found that fossils were evidence of past life and that there are four main classes of fossils. Now we'll see how fossils are formed.

Let's take a dinosaur for example:

Dinosaurs fed in shallow water and if a dinosaur died it would slowly become covered with sediment or particles of sand.

Eventually the dinosaur would be covered by a foot or two of mud. As more sediment built up on top of this the lower layers would be pressed more and more.

The pressure would then form sedimentary rock from the mud and the dinosaurs bones would be embedded in solid rock.

If the water would then, for some reason, (such as the lake filling up) evaporate, the bones would be left beneath many feet of earth.

A river cutting out a valley, or man cutting out a road could easily disturb these layers and uncover these bones.

A less exciting,, but nevertheless beautiful fern fossil is pictured in this photograph taken at the Science Center.



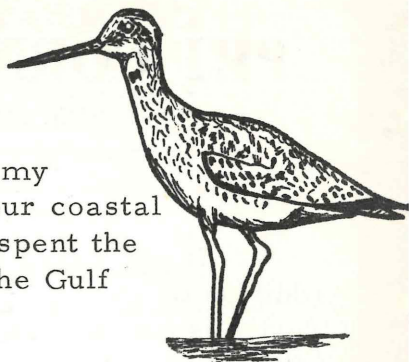
Photo by Joan Walker



# ALONG THE SHORE

by BARBARA KASHANSKI

Towards the end of March one of my favorite shore birds will be arriving in our coastal ponds and along our shores. They have spent the winter on the Southern Atlantic coasts, the Gulf Coast, and way down in South America.



This large slender bird with long yellow legs, a large, long stout bill, a grey and brown back, white stomach, and a chest and neck speckled with grey spots is the greater Yellowlegs.

It's great fun to watch the Yellowlegs feeding on small fish in shallow muddy waters. He looks as though he has lost his mind or is doing an Indian rain dance as he runs first one way, then the other, and sometimes in circles. He acts a lot more sensible when he dines on his other favorite foods; insect larva, small mollusks, and crustaceans.

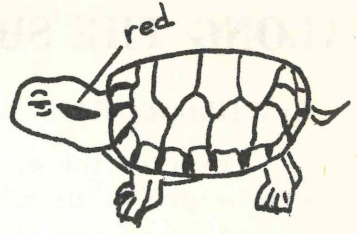
The greater Yellowlegs always seems to be on the lookout for danger, and when frightened quickly flies off, giving his loud shrill 3 or 4 note whistle which warns all other birds nearby to look out. Because of his suspicious nature and warning cries, the greater Yellowlegs used to be called "tell-tale" or "tattler," and many hunters have ended up empty handed thanks to the watchfulness of this lovely shorebird.

We only get to enjoy this shorebird in the Spring and again in August and the Fall months when he returns from his nesting grounds in the far North.

Welcome back, "Tattler". It will be good to hear your shrill cry again.

# PET CORNER

by DAVE RICHARDS



If you would like to make a lively, amusing addition to your tropical fish tank, the baby Red Eared Turtle is an obvious choice. These little fellows are found in abundance in most any pet shop and are not difficult to care for.

The Red Eared Turtles are so named because of the broad reddish stripes behind the eyes. (They are the only turtles found in North America with such a stripe, so they are easily recognized.) The Red Ears are completely aquatic, although they must be provided with a log or rock, above the water, for basking. A 100 watt bulb should be suspended over the tank and turned on at least six hours a day to simulate sunlight.

The Red Eared Turtles eat a variety of foods, although they are basically omnivorous. They should be offered freshly killed guppies (or similar small fish), lettuce, crushed snails, spinach, chopped chicken livers, or fresh insects (horseflies, etc.). Prepared turtle food consisting of dried crushed flies and cereal is useless as a basic diet. It does not contain the nutritive value of fresh food.

The Red Ears average from five to eight inches in length at maturity. They have been known to attain a record growth of eleven inches, but this is unusual.

These small turtles can be kept in captivity for a long time if properly cared for. As with any small creature you take into your home, they depend upon you and cannot survive if neglected or ignored. Their lives are your responsibility; don't mistreat them. They are at your mercy!





## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK . . . .

We welcome notice of Conservation activities or problems for inclusion in this section of the Naturalist's Notebook. . . . Please let us know of your local activity so that others may be aware of your efforts and lend their support where possible. . . .

**CURRENT LEGISLATION:** There are several bills pending which need our attention: Senate Bill # 492 An Act concerning the teaching of conservation courses in public school (something we are doing in New London and nearby). The act provides for teaching conservation in public schools and for preparing teachers in college to teach conservation. Senate Bill # 188 An Act prohibiting the distribution, sale, delivery or use of D.D.T. in Connecticut. (The case against DDT is monumental - there is no place on the earth where it is not found - even in the artic - let's stop its spread now. . .)

Senate Bill # 355 An Act concerning the beautification and cleanliness of our State. It prohibits the use of ONE WAY glass bottles. (Over 5,760,000,000 one way bottles are produced each year - guess where they end up). Senate Bill # 196 and House Bill # 6145 Acts concerning the preservation of tidal wetlands. These acts will provide for the preservation of tidal wetlands in the State. (We are losing our tidal wetlands at the rate of one acre per working day - This legislation is of major importance). **WRITE TO YOUR LOCAL LEGISLATOR AND LET HIM KNOW HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS LEGISLATION - IF YOU DON'T TELL HIM WHAT YOU WANT - YOU CAN'T EXPECT HIM TO ACT ACCORDING TO YOUR WISHES.....**

**SUNDAY - MARCH 9th - 3:00 P. M.**

We will have a special showing of the film

**THE COLONIAL NATURALIST**

at Essex Town Hall, Essex, Ct. Adult Program - \$1.00 Adm.

FOR ROCK COLLECTORS: The State of Connecticut Geological and Natural History Survey has a "Guidebook # 2 - Guide for Field Trips in Connecticut". The cost is \$ 2.50 plus tax. This booklet contains a listing of the local collecting areas throughout the State. It can be ordered from the Conn. State Library Sales and Distribution Dept., Hartford, Conn. 06115.

BLUEBIRDS: If you are going to put up bluebird houses now is the time to do it. If you have them up, it's time to clean them and get them ready for the coming nesting season. Send a self-addressed envelope to the Science Center and we will mail you a copy of our Junior Naturalist Notebook on Bluebird houses.

OIL POLLUTION: We were on the beaches and in the marshes and it was rough . . . The death toll of birds will probably reach between 400 and 600. The entire wintering population of Horned Grebes and Common Loons is considered dead.

HELP: Mr. Walker, our Curator, would like your help. He is interested in receiving information on den sites of the Copperhead or the Timber Rattlesnake, and the first appearance dates for any of Connecticut's reptiles or amphibians. For more details see his column in this issue.

UNITED FUND: The Board of Directors of the Science Center voted unanimously to leave the United Fund and seek to raise our operating funds independently. Our allocation from United Fund last year was \$ 4,000.00 while it was \$1,200.00 this year. The Board expressed its appreciation to United Fund for its past support.

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**- YOUR MEMBERSHIP HELPS SUPPORT AND MAINTAIN -**

**The Interpretive Museum of 622 Williams Street, New London, Connecticut 06320**  
**The Peace Sanctuary Nature Preserve At 200 River Road, Mystic, Connecticut 06355**



# YOUR OWN NATURE JAUNT *by BOB DEWIRE*

## TO A RED MAPLE SWAMP



Photo by Joan Walker

Early March finds the swamp very quiet. It may be covered with snow and the patches of water may be frozen. Even so, there are several things to look for. One of the first wildflowers of the year can now be found - the skunk cabbage. The large dark red spathe which hides the yellow flowers inside has pushed up through the ground. Hundreds of these may be found in a large swampland. Even snow will not prevent the skunk cabbage from flowering. The leaves come up later.

The first male red-winged blackbirds arrive during the first two weeks of March. They are here a full month before the females arrive. The males set up their territories so that all is in readiness for the arrival of the female. The swamps resound with their pleasant call of "Oka - lee". Juncos, tree, fox and white-throated sparrows are all flocking up preparing to fly north to their nesting grounds. The males begin to sing at this time and they further add to the music in the swamp.

By late March many newcomers are at the swamp. Green leaves of the skunk cabbage are beginning to unroll. Fern fiddleheads will be just beginning to push up through

the forest litter. After a couple of warm days, you may hear what sounds like many ducks all quacking at once. Closer investigation will reveal these to be wood frogs which are calling and mating. A day or two after these frogs are heard they will be joined by the familiar peep of the spring peeper. Warm evenings result in more and more of these frogs calling. Masses of frogs' eggs will be visible in the water.

If there is an area of open water in the swamp it is a good place to look for the beautiful wood duck. These birds arrive from the South in late March and settle into swampy areas. If they are flushed, the high pitched cry of the female can be clearly heard. Muskrats may also be in the open area, their heads breaking the surface of the water and forming a "v" of ripples behind them as they swim.

At the very end of the month a warm, sunny day often brings out some painted turtles. They will often climb up on rocks and logs to sun themselves. Phoebes also arrive now. Their sharp call of "phe - be" is usually heard before they are seen. They sit on branches overlooking the water areas and will suddenly fly out from the branch to snap up a small insect. Returning to his branch he will give his characteristic tail wagging. The few insects present on these warming days will serve as food supplies for these first arriving frogs and birds.

Visit a swamp this month if you get a chance. The sounds coming from it bring the long-awaited spring into reality.



# CONNECTICUT CREATURES *by MIKE WALKER*

The oft repeated phrase "Harbinger of Spring" usually brings to mind an image of the first robins back patrolling the muddy lawns of early spring. Vying with them for first honors as heralds of the change of season, however, are some lowly little creatures often heard but seldom seen.

The first sustained thaws help to form dozens of temporary pools through the woods and along country roads. Each spring, numbers of Connecticut's amphibians - frogs, toads, and salamanders - gather at these pools to breed and lay their eggs.

One of the most vocal of this moisture loving group is the Spring Peeper. He is a tiny frog - adults are seldom more than an inch long - usually light brown in color in our area. A dark, often imperfect X-shaped marking on his back helps identify him. These little tree frogs gather by the hundreds at temporary pools in the early spring and fill the cool humid air with their calls. Their voice is a high, piping whistle, repeated about once a second. A chorus of them, heard from a distance, has been compared to the sound of sleigh bells.



Photo by Joan Walker

The Spring Peepers' breeding season begins with the first warm rains and may last as late as June. Eggs are laid in large, jelly-like masses in the water, and shortly they hatch into tiny tadpoles. The tadpoles, feeding on minute plant and animal life, transform rapidly into smaller copies of their parents. Spring Peepers are seldom found except during the breeding season, although they are active in damp woodlands through the summer and well into fall. We heard an occasional Spring Peeper in the woods back of the Science Center as late as October this year.

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We would like your help in gathering information about Connecticut's reptiles and amphibians. We are particularly interested in three areas:

1. Winter den sites of the Northern Copperhead or the Timber Rattlesnake. We want to begin keeping a record of known localities for these two snakes and we would like to photograph them at dens when they emerge this spring.

2. Breeding ponds where salamanders, frogs or toads have been seen gathering in large numbers.

3. First appearance information on any of our reptiles or amphibians. The first time you see one of these animals we'd like to know about it.

If you can help, please get in touch with me at the Science Center - 443-4295.



# FIELD NOTES

Jan. 1 - Feb. 15

Essex, Saybrook, Lyme and East Lyme: Three BALD EAGLES are wintering along the Connecticut River in the Essex area. Five PINTAILS were at the Saybrook Causeway on Feb. 8th and 16 BRANT and 50 BONAPARTE'S GULLS were at Lynde Point. At Great Island in Lyme there were 3 ROUGH-LEGGED HAWKS and a MARSH HAWK on the 8th. The RED-HEADED WOODPECKER is still present at Rocky Neck up to this writing. The bird's head is getting very red. A MUTE SWAN was electrocuted when its wings struck the power lines over the road at Gorton's Pond on Feb. 3.

Waterford and New London: The always scarce RED-SHOULDERED HAWK was seen at Cross Road and I95 in January. BLUEBIRDS are wintering at Mary Butler Drive and PINE SISKENS are at feeders there. EVENING GROSBEAKS have, for the most part, passed through the area and gone further South (they have been reported in feeders in South Carolina), although a few reports have been received. REDPOLLS are scarce, but there is a sizeable flock in Montville. In Smith's Cove, two ducks that usually winter further South were present. One was a GREEN-WINGED TEAL on Jan. 4th and the other was a WOOD DUCK on the 5th. Two SURF SCOTERS are wintering near the mouth of the Thames River and a CAROLINA WREN is wintering at the Science Center. A LONG-EARED OWL was at Harkness Park on Feb. 11th.

Groton, Mystic and Stonington: At Groton Long Point there are DUNLIN, BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER and RUDDY TURNSTONE on the mudflat in Mumford Cove. A ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK was present on Jan. 12th, a LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE was there on Jan. 22nd and a SHORT-EARED OWL is wintering between the Point and Trumbull Airport.

At the Peace Sanctuary an uncommon PIGEON HAWK was present on Jan. 7th and PINE SISKENS are at the feeding station. A SNOW BUNTING was at Eastern Point in January and a flock of RED CROSSBILLS were on Ender's Island on the 25th. In Stonington, an ICELAND GULL was present on Jan. 24th and 35 - 40 MEADOWLARKS were at Wamphassuc Point.

Rhode Island Shoreline: At Napatree Point a SNOW BUNTING was seen on Jan. 25th. A flock of 50 MEADOWLARKS was at Quonochontaug on Feb. 8th. The rare RAZORBILL, a bird related to the Puffin, was seen at Point Judith on Jan. 11th and an even rarer EARED GREBE was at Narragansett Bay on Jan. 18th.

Contributors to this column were: Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Bates, Grace Bissell, Janet Boyd, Mr. and Mrs. Philip Dewire, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Dewire, Trudy Gardner, Helen Gilman, Rick Holloway, Mr. C. J. Lamare, Margaret MacGregor, Walter Moran, Bill Morgan and Paul Spitzer.

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Spring is now upon us and with its arrival flowers begin to bloom, animals come out of hibernation and birds migrate North. In the past we have been fortunate to have a group of people who have been a great help to us by making reports of observations they have made. We would like very much to increase the number of contributors to this column. Therefore, we would like to have reports from as many of you that would care to help us. Report any of Spring's first events by phoning the Science Center at 443-4295.



# MARCH ACTIVITIES

March 2...2:00 - 5:00 P.M. Sunday Side Show held at Lyman-Allyn Museum. Bring your family for a very enjoyable afternoon. The Science Center will have an exhibit at this event.

March 8...8:30 A.M. Family Nature Jaunt to Harkness Memorial State Park. Meet at the Harkness parking lot.\*

March 9...1:00 - 4:00 P.M. Bird Banding Program at the Peace Sanctuary. A special program which will be conducted throughout the afternoon. The public is invited to come at any time between 1:00 and 4:00 P.M. to watch the banding station in operation.\*

March 15...10:00 - 11:00 A.M. A Junior Workshop for members in Grades 4, 5 and 6. "Bottle Gardens" Those participating should bring a wide-mouthed jar or bottle to put their plants in and a large spoon or trowel. Registration required - limit 10.\*

March 16...2:30 P.M. Family Film Festival at the Lyman-Allyn Museum Auditorium. Film will be Walt Disney's African Lion. Fee of 50¢ will be charged to defray the cost.

March 22 - 23...1:00 - 5:00 P.M. Special Exhibit at the Science Center's Interpretive Building: "Strange Stories of Sea Shells".

March 29...10:00 - 11:30 A.M. A junior Nature Jaunt to the Arboretum. Open to all Junior Members. Meet at the entrance to the Arboretum.\*

March 30...3:00 P.M. Audubon Wildlife Film. Held at Clarke Center, Mitchell College. Mr. Albert J. Wool will present his film Ranch and Range. Guest tickets will be available at the door.

\*cancel in the event of rain

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APRIL PREVIEW: April 5...Junior Workshop for grades 1, 2 and 3 - "Nesting Materials" Registration required. Limit 15.

April 6. . . Easter Sunday -- Center closed.



# NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

Published by the

**THAMES SCIENCE CENTER**

622 Williams Street  
New London, Connecticut 06320

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**JOHN F. GARDNER**--*Executive Director*  
**ROBERT C. DEWIRE**--*Naturalist*  
**MICHAEL WALKER**--*Curator*

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The Thames Science Center is a nonprofit organization seeking a quality environment through education.

The active support of children and adults in the Science Center, its programs, activities and efforts is earnestly solicited.

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John F. Gardner  
*Editor*

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## SPRING'S FIRST FLOWER